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ABSTRACT

Nearly 1,000 technical and further education (TAFE) teachers in Australia responded to a national survey to determine the impact of funding cuts, constant changes, and restructuring on their work and family life. More than 2,000 questionnaires were sent to a random sample of education union members, approximately 1,700 women and 300 men. In addition, 600 questionnaires were distributed to 400 female and 200 male casual and sessional teachers. The survey found that the average age of TAFE teachers is 47, that about 50 percent have children under age 18 at home, that 20 percent have care responsibilities for aged family members, and that women are more likely to be on fixed term contracts or temporary or part-time rates. The survey also found that teachers work an average of 7 to 8 hours of unpaid overtime per week, primarily because of extra time needed for preparation, administration, correction and assessment, and coordination and meetings. The teachers cited funding cuts and constant restructuring as two of the changes that have had the most impact on their workload. Other changes that have most affected their work included reporting and accountability requirements, cuts to teaching staff, and changes in delivery modes and curriculum. A majority of the teachers said that these changes have had a significant negative impact on how they see their work and their professional interactions, as well as on their family responsibilities and family relationships. Part-time and casual teachers reported the greatest difficulties, because they usually had other jobs and had a hard time with the decreased flexibility of TAFE teaching assignments. (KC)

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TAFE teachers: facing the challenge

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Funding cuts and constant change/restructure are two of the key changes that have had the most impact on the work of technical and further education (TAFE) teachers. The vast majority have seen their workload increase and their ability to fulfil their family and household responsibilities affected. Nearly one thousand TAFE teachers have had their say in a national survey conducted by the Australian Education Union (AEU). This is an initial report of some of the outcomes.

The survey

The AEU survey of TAFE teachers undertaken in the second half of 2000 follows on from the *Building the Foundations of our Future* project undertaken in relation to teachers in schools in 1999. The overall project arose as an initiative of the AEU's national women's program and does have a particular but not exclusive focus on women. Essentially, the aim of the project has been to look at the changing nature of teachers' work and workload, the impact on teachers' lives, and the priorities they see for union action.

While the TAFE survey has looked at similar issues to those addressed in the previous research on schools, it was of course tailored to the particular circumstances and challenges facing TAFE, and TAFE teachers. The budget cuts, and particularly growth through efficiencies, have created enormous pressure within TAFE. In addition TAFE, as we know, has been at the cutting edge of competitive tendering, user choice, new delivery modes and marketisation.

This context has shaped the TAFE questionnaire and project. In particular, the AEU's National TAFE Women's Committee urged that attention be given to the views of casual/sessional/hourly paid teachers, and that both members and nonmembers in that category be asked to respond. The research proposal was endorsed by the National TAFE Council Executive and Federal Executive in June 2000, and the questionnaire was administered in August.

Over 2000 questionnaires were sent out to members via a random sample: about 1700 to women and 300 to men. In addition, 600 questionnaires were distributed to casual/sessional teachers - 400 women and 200 men, both members and nonmembers - to ensure that the particular disadvantages faced by casual teachers informed the research, and to try to explore their relationship to their work, their needs, and their response to the union.

The questionnaire is 12 pages long, and very detailed. It asked about teachers' employment, about their family/personal responsibilities, about their paid and real hours of work and the factors that have affected their work and their workload. It asked about their professional development and study, qualifications, career, their interest in promotion and about their work and family. And of course we asked them

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about their involvement in the union, their priorities and suggestions for union action. For the casual nonmembers, we asked why they chose not to be members, and what the union could do that would encourage them to join.

In total, just over 940 teachers responded in time to be included in the analysis. This is an overall response rate of 35.5%, which is very good. For members in the random sample it was 37%, while for the subgroup of 600 casual/sessional teachers, it was 30%.

Who are TAFE teachers?

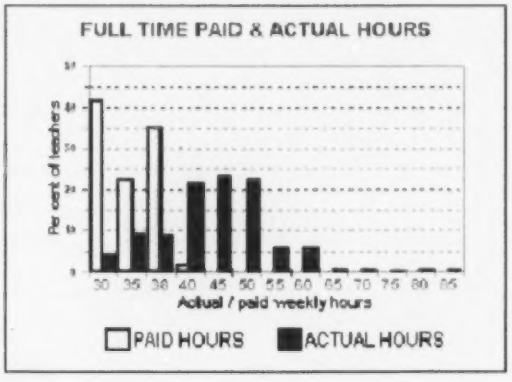
The average age of TAFE teachers is 47.4. Eight percent (80%) have a spouse/partner and more than 80% have children, with about half having children under 18. A far greater proportion of women than men say they are the prime caregiver for dependent children, and a far higher proportion of men say their partner works part time or does not have a paid job.

In addition, one in five teachers have caring responsibilities for aged family members. Over a quarter of these partners are other teachers - a problem when you consider the impact that current workloads have on teachers' family lives.

Our survey also confirms that women are more likely to be on fixed term contracts/temporary and or casual/sessional/hourly rates.

Workload

There are some complexities in looking at hours of work, because of interstate differences describing total paid hours or attendance time requirements. But on average, full-time teachers are working 43.8 hours a week. This is an average of 7 hours unpaid overtime a week, although the spread is obviously pretty wide, with 57% working more than 40 hours a week and 34% working more than 45 hours a week. Without getting into the intricacies of the calculations, this unpaid overtime done by full-time teachers would be roughly equivalent to 2160 additional effective full-time teachers.


FULL TIME PAID & ACTUAL HOURS
Per cent of teachers
30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85
Actual / paid weekly hours
PAID HOURS
ACTUAL HOURS

Teachers who work part time or irregular hours are doing an average of 7.7 hours unpaid overtime each week. It is difficult to give more than a rough estimate, but when you take into account the range of hours that people might be working, the unpaid work done by teachers who are working less than full time could well be equivalent to something like another 4600 effective full-time teachers.

Activities adding extra workload

Teachers were asked to rank the activities that led them to work more than their official hours. Preparation, administration, correction/assessment, special responsibilities like coordination and meetings are the most dominant factors in

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increasing workload. There were some interesting differences in the responses of men and women. For example, more women ranked student welfare in their top five factors (23.7% compared to 13.6%), while more men ranked industry and community liaison in their top five (21.3% compared to 11.6%). But the overall similarities are far greater than the differences.

Top five factors in workload

Most frequently cited factors	%
Preparation	63.0
Administration (including accountability requirements)	53.2
Correction/assessment	51.5
Special responsibilities (eg coordination activities)	35.7
Meetings	30.7
Classroom/other delivery	24.6
Student welfare	21.4
Curriculum customisation	17.6
Curriculum development	16.2
Professional/staff development	15.8
Maintenance of current/professional competency	14.2
Industry and/or community liaison	13.8
Flexible delivery (not including on-line)	12.0

Changes that have had the most impact on work

Over half of teachers listed the funding cuts as one of the five changes that has had the most impact on their work, and nearly half listed the constant change and restructure. Other factors most often listed include reporting and accountability requirements, the cuts to teaching staff, the changes in delivery modes and curriculum, and the reduced job security/greater casualisation. There were some relatively minor differences between women and men, but the overall picture is very clear across all teachers.

Five changes impacting most on work

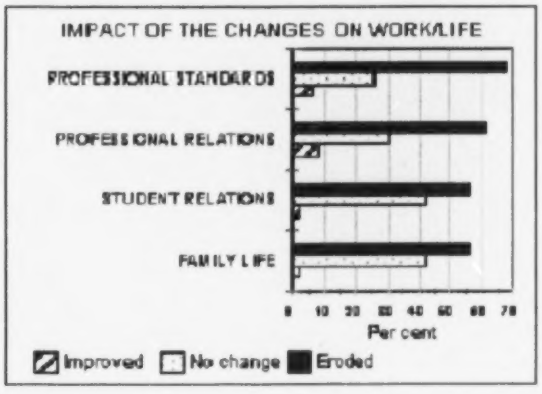
Most frequently cited changes	%
TAFE funding cuts	53.1
Constant change/restructure	45.1
Reporting and accountability requirements	39.2
Cuts to teaching staff	35.8
Changes in delivery modes	33.0
Curriculum changes	32.7
Reduced job security/greater casualisation	31.6
Training packages	31.5
Cuts to support staff	26.9

Technological change	21.2
Changing student clientele	19.3
Workplace training and assessment	18.0

Impact of the changes on work and life

The changes that teachers have experienced have had a significant impact on how they see their work and their professional interactions. In total, 86% say their workload has increased or significantly increased, and about the same number state that stress at work has increased or significantly increased.

More than two thirds (68%) say their ability to maintain professional standards/ provide quality education has been eroded. While nearly 44% say that their ability to maintain and update their technical skills has increased, about 30% say it has decreased. In addition, 61% say that professional interaction between staff has been eroded, and half say that their relations/interactions with students have been eroded. Teachers themselves, in other words, are expressing concerns about the quality of teaching and learning that can be provided in the current environment.



In total, 56% of TAFE teachers also said that their family life had been eroded as a result of the changes in their work. An even higher proportion (69%) said that their work responsibilities impact on their capacity to fulfil their family/household responsibilities.

> I have to try and juggle long hours at work. Work for work at home - teaching preparation - I don't get time to do this at work and this is very stressful. My family gets sick of the workload, they do not understand why it has to be this way. (NSW female, ongoing)

> Arrive home exhausted, quick meals, often back into work on computer in evenings. I can never get on top of workload. Started leaving at 7.00am to get into work earlier (didn't see family pre-work). Later I started going on in weekends - only way to get on top of things - especially with training course I ran in business sector. I had no support staff to help with materials preparation, resources etc. Constantly stressed. Saw less (much

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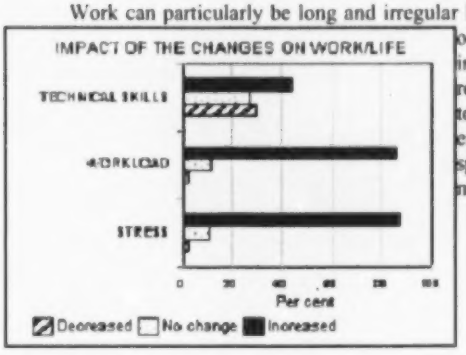
less) of wider family. Excessive workload resulted in humourless, exhausted me - took stress home. Everyone suffered.
(Victorian female, ongoing)

Work can particularly be long and irregular hours. Difficult to plan care of child. Stress of job, insecurity effects relationships. Constant need to increase and learn skills erodes time available to spend with my wife. (WA male, temporary/fixed term)



Part time and casual/sessional/hourly paid teachers

85% of the part time and casual/hourly paid teachers who responded get their main income from TAFE, and 45% of them would like to increase their hours or work full time. In their struggle to make ends meet in precarious employment, 53% of all part time and casual teachers are doing other jobs as well - 23% of these work in other TAFEs, 37% in industry, 11% in higher education, and 5% in schools and nearly 40% in other work.

As one male casual teacher from NSW said:

> No predictability of work schedules - amount, times, days, income. Must take other work to provide other income which produces clashes in time and often extended work hours, weekends. Impossible to plan/co-ordinate workplace arrangements. No provision of facilities (storage/working space/computer) at TAFE so home space is used for work office purposes. Difficult to juggle work when needed - 16 weeks of no TAFE income: hard to supplement unless flexible work arrangements can be sought elsewhere - no social security support available during these periods so my TAFE income is limited to 8 months of the year. Try it, not easy.

Reasons for joining the union

80% of teachers listed protection of employment/industrial conditions in their top five reasons. The next two reasons most frequently mentioned were promoting and upholding the profession of teachers (65%), and solidarity/ideological/personal

commitment (54%). Collective bargaining power followed at 52.7%, and promoting/protecting public education followed closely behind at 51.5%. Nearly half (48.1%) also listed legal protection. It is important to recognise that union members see the union's role not only as protecting their conditions, but as being the professional voice of teachers and an advocate for public education.

All teachers, irrespective of whether they were permanent/ongoing, fixed term/temporary, or casual/sessional, listed the protection of conditions most frequently, followed by promoting and upholding the profession of teachers. However, casual/sessional teachers listed promoting/protecting public education and legal protection more highly, and collective bargaining lower, than did other teachers. This perhaps reflects the current despair felt by many casual/sessional teachers about their employment mode and conditions and their recognition that promoting and protecting public education is vital to change. Given the precariousness of their employment, they may also feel a greater need of legal protection.

Priorities for the union

Teachers were asked to rank union priorities in relation to TAFE, and their answers indicate the varied roles that the union plays on behalf of members, collectively and individually. Restoring a viable quality TAFE system was in the top five priorities of three out of four teachers. Somewhat over half listed security of employment and better conditions. A fraction under half listed providing a professional voice. Protection of individuals was the priority cited most frequently after those four.

Top five priorities for the union

Most frequently cited priorities	%
Restoring viable quality TAFE system	73.4
Security of employment	53.9
Better conditions	52.7
Providing a professional voice	49.1
Protection for individuals	47.8
Higher salary	34.4
Advocacy for public education	32.1
Reduced workload	26.4
Professional/staff development	24.7
Education policy in general	21.9
Promotion opportunities	7.2
Other	3.0

If teachers identified better conditions as a priority for the union, they were asked to nominate the three particular improvements that they would most like to see. Half of all responses included general and specific claims for maintenance of - or, more often - improvements in the conditions of work.

There was a recognition that teachers' work has changed, and that this needs to be addressed in the way in which teachers' work arrangements are structured and controlled.

> Contacts = teaching hours etc. is an antiquated system. Does not reflect issues such as travel, up front assessments, workplace training, on line delivery etc. (Victorian female, ongoing)

The need to address the conditions of casual and part-time teachers features in responses from both ongoing teachers and, more particularly, part-time and casual/sessional teachers. Many teachers spoke of the need to give temporary teachers access to permanency and thus equivalent conditions to ongoing teachers. Job security was in itself a major issue, with one quarter of all respondents mentioning the need for greater job security, including nearly half of all the temporary/casual teachers. The most frequently mentioned issue in relation to part time or casual conditions would undoubtedly have been the need to provide pro rata leave and related benefits. Being compensated for the actual hours worked, including preparation time, assessment time, meetings and other requirements was also an issue in relation to part time and casual teachers' conditions.

Measures to reduce teacher workload were highlighted by nearly 64% of ongoing and 25% of temporary/casual teachers. Apart from general comments about the need to reduce workloads, a key sub-theme was the need to reduce teaching/delivery hours, usually in recognition of all the other duties teachers are trying to deal with in their working week. This was expressed in a number of ways: as a demand for more teachers, as reduced delivery hours, and as increased time for preparation and other specific responsibilities.

The other major stressor requiring change in relation to conditions is the pressure of administrative duties. Teachers either wanted their administrative duties reduced, by doing away with unnecessary paperwork and/or by having access to increased clerical support, or else they wanted other duties to be decreased in order to cope with the administration. There were also specific calls for more coordination time.

The other major priority identified by teachers is the need to increase funding and resources for TAFE. More than half of the ongoing teachers (53%) identified this as a priority, as did 37.1% of the temporary/casual teachers.

> Restore TAFE funding - we've got to stage where we can't meet our promises (tender) with the same quality or choices for students. (SA female, temporary/fixed term)

> Restore/increase TAFE funding so that we can do the job we are supposed to - no cutting classes or courses, or increasing class sizes. (NSW female, casual)

Apart from general issues of resources, teachers identified the need for improved teaching resources and equipment, with a particular emphasis on reasonable access to updated computers and other technology. Many teachers also focused on the inadequate facilities within which they worked, in both delivery and other areas. Part-time and casual teachers were in a number of instances more concerned to establish an entitlement of access to the most basic of resources at all.

This report highlights some of the key outcomes of the research, but there is a wealth of further information about what TAFE teachers are doing and thinking about their work, their union and their lives, much of which will be included in the final report. The TAFE teachers who added to their workload by filling in this long questionnaire deserve congratulations and thanks.

As one teacher so wryly commented:

> I spend far too much time here (as I am now, doing this at 8.30pm). (Tasmanian male, ongoing).

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